

The Role of Religious Education and Educational Methodology for Innovations, Ethical Change and Cross-cultural Understanding in Sri Lanka

Mallika Rajaratnam

University of Peradeniya/Catholic University of America

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic, multi religious and multilingual country of rich heritage and consists of more than 70% Buddhists and other people follow Hinduism 12%, Islam 9%, Christianity 7%. In the Sri Lankan Constitution chapter II Article 9 protects Religious Freedom for all religions though Buddhism is given the foremost place under the 1978 Republican Constitution. And further Articles 10 and 14 also give the freedom of thought and religion of every person in Sri Lanka. In the Sri Lankan state Education System Religious Education is mandatory for all the citizens up to GCE Ordinary Level and any student can continue his or her religious research studies for their higher degrees in the university education System. Sri Lankan State and Society are not secularized in the commonsense understanding of Secularism as non-religious or neutral towards religion in political and civil affairs in the State, but alienated the real meaning and the bases of creativity and value system in the education system by not revising the outdated positivistic methodology. The aim of this presentation is to search and explore a proper methodology of religious education and for education system in Sri Lanka to overcome our contemporary crises.

In a multi - cultural Society Religion should be taught with its deeper experiential understanding to promote unity in diversity and meaningful co-existence among all religious communities of Sri Lankan citizens. Sri Lanka after the Independence faced many ethical problems and civil wars which ruined our country and still facing more and more ethical and political crises which dragged our development of rich heritage and over all development in all the fields. Religious Education should be a uniting force rather than dividing force among communities. In a multi-cultural society, the cultural diversity is a blessing to promote our political, social and personal ethics and culture. But what happened to Sri Lanka? What went wrong? How do we overcome these ethical crises of our political culture to have more meaning co-existence and prosperous creative education system to develop our Nation in every issues.

There are some issues in religious education system which neglect the practical experiential existential expressions and Reflexive understanding of Religions due to the influence and dominance of Logical Positivism and Scientism in the Education system in Sri Lanka. Since our existing education system and its methodology mainly focus on the objective scientific methodology for human sciences, social sciences and religious studies as well as sciences, and could not explore interdisciplinary approaches in our education system. To transcend these problems and sectarian barriers and to understand common humanity, cross cultural understanding and creativity through religious education, there should be a transformative reflexive qualitative methodology or an integral methodology in the Education system.

South Asian and East Asian Religions are mostly non – theistic and based more on ethical values which should explore the common humanity/common ground and universal understanding of Self-Realization. These Universal Perennial messages are in all the major world regions as the mystic philosophers of world religions speak the same deeper Experiential Truth based on their Gospels. “All the paths lead to the same summit’ and also as mentioned in Indian Texts the “Truth is One but wise call it by various names”. These are the common deeper messages explored in all the world religions to understand the ‘unity of all beings’ as explored by Perennial Philosophers and Traditional Theorists and Mystics of all the Religions. These Perirenal messages and the Conscious Transcendental understanding are core messages of all religions but not explored in our education system and in the society by our sectarian education system which was influenced by Positivism, Scientism, and Sectarianism of our Political Culture. This may lead to the critique of religion as unprogressive component in our society. But identifying new methodologies for religious education or value education can enhance innovations, Ethical change and cross-cultural understanding to overcome the Problems of Present-day Sri Lankan Society and Polity.

This presentation critically explores the critique of religion of Buddha, Kant, Nietzsche and Karl Marx in order to understand the meaning of these criticism of religion to overcome the issues of these critiques of religions and to explore the relevance and role of religious education and its integral methodology in our Sri Lankan Society. Ans also including Inter-religious education will be an effective way to enrich inter-cultural literacy and strengthen cross-cultural understanding and communication for better meaningful co-existence in multicultural society.

The holistic approach is an approach that has received ample attention both in general education and religious education. It proposes that education should nurture the development of the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual aspects of personhood. Education should contribute to every person’s complete development – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. Philosophy of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Anthropological studies of Religion, Theology, Religious experience and Psychology of Religion etc. and all these components should be studied with suitable integral religious education with transformative methodology to explore the inner creative potentials through reflexive understanding and the holistic message of real meaning of Education.

Philosophical phenomenological and hermeneutical methodology of Religious Education can transform both educational thought and the academic discipline of religious studies, but in Sri Lanka the literature of religious education pedagogy has paid limited attention to these developments. Philosophy of Phenomenology as Science of sciences and as radical way of philosophizing human sciences and consciousness, explores subjective universal experiential understanding and inter-subjective or interpersonal understanding which can make transformation in religious education and an integral methodology in the curriculum will contribute for innovation and ethical change, and cross - cultural understanding in Sri Lanka.

Keywords - Integral Methodology, Reflexive Understanding, Religious Experience, Innovation. Ethical Change, Cross-cultural communication.

